Critical Incident Support Case for Change

Date: January 6, 2015

Topic: Improving Post-Critical incident Response

The Need: A critical incident is an event that has the capacity to overwhelm an individual's or an organizations normal coping mechanisms.

Critical Incident Peer Support is one component of a comprehensive program required from minimizing incident stress, to effective management of stress in individuals, and treatment to minimize ongoing disability due to stress disorders. Critical Incident Stress Management programs are best integrated into a larger organizational and comprehensive approach to behavioral health and wellness that requires a range of strategies. Peer Support has become the foundation of the more successful CISM programs within the wildland fire community. The program and information provided and recommended in this report focuses on a proposal for a national interagency Critical Incident Peers Support (CIPS) program.

Benefits of Peer Support: Peer supporters offer instant credibility and the ability to empathize. If there is a large enough cadre of trained peers, program staff can heighten the empathy inherent in the peer relationship by matching them with fellow firefighters on the basis of the nature of the particular incident.

Benefits of early intervention by both professional and peer-support personnel who are specially trained and follow established protocols of stress management can promote positive recovery from traumatic stress. Experts believe that various techniques and processes used in Critical Incident Peer Support can help individuals improve their coping abilities and dramatically decrease the occurrence of Post -Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), lower the tension and mitigate the group's reaction to a traumatic event.

Current Critical Incident Peer Support Programs in the Interagency Wildland Fire Community: The capacity of the current network is overwhelmed. The lack of standards and oversight have the potential to delay or prevent recovery of exposed employees. Most significant among these themes is the **need for a standardized and nationally coordinated program, in which positions, scope/limitation of duties, training standards, and intervention protocols are clearly defined under a single *research-based* intervention model**. Because recipients of CISM/Peer Support are employees who may be experiencing high levels of distress and potentially symptoms of trauma, there exists a significant potential for psychological harm imposed by often well-meaning efforts to "do something" or intervene. .

Vision for Critical Incident Support

Effectively prepare our people for exposure to critical incidents by providing support before, during and after a critical incident.

Doctrine

- Our actions demonstrate that people are our greatest value.
- Provide professional, standardized and consistent services across agency boundaries.
- Built on a foundation of psychological/social science using an evidence-based approach to program development.
- Developing and maintaining a learning culture that fosters continuous improvement.
- Prepared to appropriately respond when needed.
- Success is a shared responsibility.
- A Code of Ethics exists to guide actions associated with this program
- "Do No Harm".

Short Term (This Field Season)

Evaluate the Demand

- Identify the need – numbers of requests, responses, etc.
- Capture base rates of health problems.
- Capacity of organization is overwhelmed and lack of standards and oversight has the potential to delay or prevent recovery.
- What is the need for a dedicated system for effective response?
- Need for integrated Peer Support and vetted mental health care response.

Standardized Response

- Criteria "sideboards" for response.
- Mobilization Process.
- Roles and Responsibilities.
- HRSP Roles.

Training

- Provide national oversight over CISM course delivery.
- Clarify recruitment and selection of trainees.
- Define coordination and credentialing.

National IDIQ and Payment Mechanism for Clinicians

- USFS and DOI
- Standard EAP processes currently vary between forests, regions and agencies.

Establish Standard Operating Procedures Roles and Responsibilities
- Partner Organizations
- GACC's
- GMAC's
- NWCG
- Agency Administrators
- Supervisors
- Peer Supporters/Coordinators

Develop A Code Ethics
- Confidentially
- Conduct and performance

Determine Legal Considerations for privilege, confidentiality, etc.

Staffing Considerations (FY 15 Investment 1 million)
- Four dedicated positions:
- 2 Coordinators (1 FS and 1 BLM)
- 2 Agency Administrative Points of Contact (ROSS, Admin, Web Site, Statistics)
- 4 Detailers (annual rotation)
- FY 16 Budget determine based on analysis of FY 15)
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